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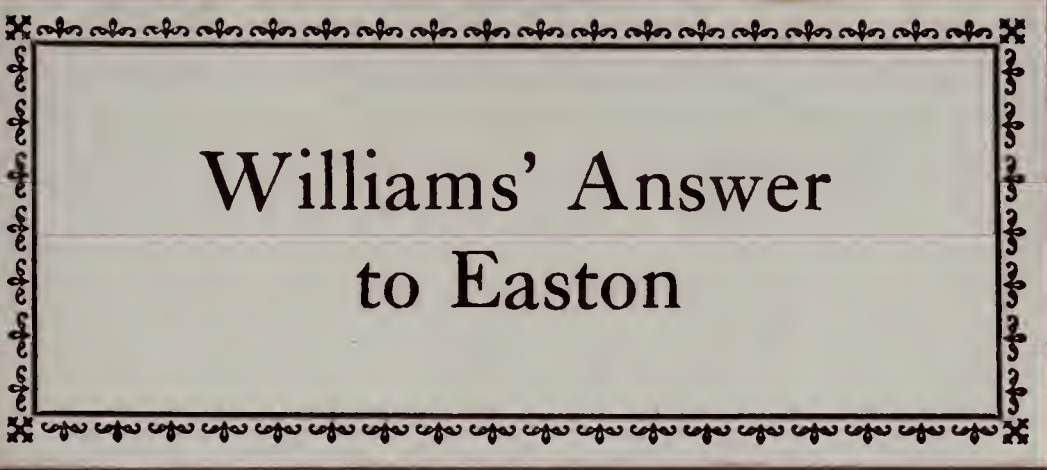
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Williams, Roger, 1604?-1683.
An answer to a scandalous
paper which came to my hand

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Williams' Answer
to Easton



Publication No. 37

An Answer

to a Scandalous Paper
which came to my hand
from the Massachusets
Clamouring against the Purchase
and Slandering the Purchasers
of Qunnunnagut Iland,
and subscribed by
John Easton.

by ROGER WILLIAMS

TRANSCRIBED from the Original Manuscript given
to The Rhode Island Historical Society by the Hon.
FREDERICK S. PECK and here Published, with an
Explanatory Introduction, for the *Society of Colonial
Wars in the State of Rhode Island and Providence
Plantations* by its GOVERNOR, Byron Sprague Watson,
Esquire, and the COUNCIL of the Society.

PREFACE

THE document we print here was presented to the Rhode Island Historical Society two years ago by the Hon. Frederick S. Peck, a former Governor of the SOCIETY OF COLONIAL WARS IN THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS. One of the great pieces in Mr. Peck's superb collection of historical manuscripts, it was purchased by him in 1934 at the auction of the library of the late Rev. Dr. Roderick Terry of Newport. Where Dr. Terry acquired it is not known, but at one time it was in the possession of the Rev. Dr. Ezra Stiles, the President of Yale College, who had been a minister at Newport from 1756 to 1777 and may have acquired it during that period. In the left-hand margin of the first page, in Dr. Stiles' handwriting, is the notation: "An Original Letter of the Rev^d. Roger Williams."

Extracts from this manuscript, referring to the purchase of the Island of Rhode Island, were printed in 1777 by the Rev. Isaac Backus in his HISTORY OF THE BAPTISTS IN NEW ENGLAND, vol. I, p. 91, and the same sections were reprinted in the NARRAGANSETT CLUB PUBLICATIONS, vol. VI, p. 305. In the catalogue of the Terry sale even larger excerpts were printed and the first and last pages of the manuscript were reproduced in facsimile. But it was not until 1934 that the full text of the letter was printed in RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS, vol. XXVII, p. 85.

The document is here presented for the first time with an explanation which, though brief, is designed to assist

the reader in fitting it into its proper place in Rhode Island's history. Also, certain minor errors made in transcribing it in 1934 have been corrected, and the original paleographic idiosyncracies faithfully reproduced.

The chief factor in the decision to print this document, however, was the thought that by publishing a manuscript of such prime historical importance we would be not only adding a distinguished item to the Society's list of publications but also drawing attention once more to the vast debt which Rhode Island historians owe to the generosity of Frederick S. Peck.

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INTRODUCTION

by BRADFORD FULLER SWAN

WHEN Canonicus and his nephew Miantonomi, chief sachems of the Narragansetts, deeded the Island of Rhode Island to William Coddington and associates on 24 March 1637/8, they also extended to the English the right to "the Marsh or grasse upon Quinunigut [Conanicut Island] and the rest of the Islands in the Bay," excepting Prudence, which was owned by Roger Williams and Governor John Winthrop.

But these meadow rights, especially after the death of the two sachems, were a matter of contention for years, and on 23 January 1654/5 the Town of Portsmouth voted to join with Newport in the outright purchase of Conanicut and Dutch Island, and appointed two men to discuss the plan with Newport representatives. No purchase was made at this time, however.

Two years later Coddington and Benedict Arnold, Sr., acting in behalf of a group of Newport and Portsmouth men, bought Conanicut for £100 from the sachem Cojonoquant, brother of the deceased Miantonomi and one of four claimants to the overlordship of the Narragansetts. This deed, dated 17 April 1657, immediately set off a bitter quarrel.

John Easton, the Attorney General of the Colony, prepared a written protest against the transaction, and all the evidence indicates he contended that the purchasers had got Cojonoquant drunk in order to put the deal across, that the island was not the property of Cojonoquant but belonged instead to Scuttop and Quequaquenuit, sons of

Mixanno and thus grandsons of Canonicus, and that Coddington and Arnold were conspiring to get the property for themselves.

Easton's protest was sent to the Governor of Massachusetts Bay, who sent it in turn to Roger Williams, then President of the Colony. Williams' reply is the document which we here present.

It shows Williams in one of his angrier moods; his figures of speech are strong indeed, even for that day of outspoken controversy. It also shows him in an unfamiliar role: that of severe critic of the Indians. Elsewhere he referred to Cojonoquant as a "poor beast (always drunk)" but he apparently thought little more of Easton's Indian clients, for he castigates them, and their father before them, as violators of pledges and no strangers to the bottle, "especially the youngest of the two."

Williams indicates in this paper that some other sachem joined Cojonoquant in selling the island. Whether he is referring to the local petty sachem or to Pessacus, Cojonoquant's brother and thus the fourth claimant to the position of chief sachem of the Narragansetts, we cannot tell. Pessacus, however, did not give a confirmatory deed until 1659.

In November, 1658, a General Court of Commissioners of the Colony stepped into the conflict set off by the Conanicut purchase, and confirmed the transaction "as lawful as purchased from the Indians if it were not bought before." Then the General Court proceeded to outlaw any similar purchases in the future without official permission.

The following year, on 18 July 1659, probably to clear any cloud from the title, the purchasers obtained a deed from the two dissenting sachems, Scuttop and Quequaquenuit, for £155, and a week later, for £60, received a deed from Pessacus. These three deeds took care of the chief sachems and another £5 bought the approbation of Towasibbam, petty sachem of Conanicut.

WILLIAMS' ANSWER TO EASTON

As forwre to a scandalous paper cam to my hand from Massachusetts
clarioning agt y^e purchas & standing y^e purchas^r of Quininnagut
fland, & subscribed by John Easton.

An original letter of the Rev. Eugen Williams

The good providence of y^e God of truth seems to call me to discourse the
truth of proceedings touching this fland: partly as it hath pleased
his Mercy to use me as an Instrument, betwixt y^e English of Rhode Island
& y^e Natives about Rhode Island, Quininnagut & from y^e beginning
partly as I have been called out by letters from y^e Massachusetts
Rhode Island, as also by opportunities from y^e Natives to transire in
this business: partly, as it concerns me in many respects; some thing
more then every one, to endeavour y^e peace & libertie of the
ay within it selfe, & betwixt this Colony of the other Colonie
of y^e Barbarians round about us. And lastly, the fier by an having
been sent about y^e Country, & eerr to y^e Gov^r hand of the
Sachusit, & from his to mine, I judge it my dutie not to be
unwilling to put to this reasonable hand to quench it.

I shall first premise a word to y^e purchas of Rhode Island with y^e Gov^r
of Quininnagut & with w^{ch} this paper begins.
I have acknowledged & have & shall endeavor to maintaine y^e Rights
& proprietie of every inhabitant of Rhode Island in peace. yet
since there is so much sound & noise of purchas & purchas^r; I
judge it not unreasonable to declare y^e Rise & bottom of the
planting of Rhode Island in y^e fountain of it. It was not
purchas^r nor money y^e could have purchas^r Rhode Island. Rhode
Island was obtained by Love: by y^e Love & Friendship
of an Gentleman & then Hans Red and my selfe had with y^e
great Sachim Miantunnomu about y^e League, w^{ch} I procure
betwixt y^e Massachusetts English & y^e Natives in
the great war.

It is true, I advised a Gratuity to be presented to y^e Sachim & y^e Natives
And because Mr Coddington & y^e rest of my Co: Countrymen
were to inhabite y^e place & to be at y^e charge of y^e Gratuity
I drew up a writing in Mr Coddingtons name, & y^e names of such
of my Co: Countrymen as cam up with him & put it into a Sack
as forme as I could at y^e time (amongst y^e Indians) for y^e Benefit
of Assurance of y^e future inhabitants of y^e fland.

This gratuity, y^e as y^e Natives noble Sachim Hans hath been so great an Instrument
in my hand of God for y^e procuring of this fland from y^e Barbarians
as also for y^e procuring & confirming of y^e charter. So y^e may by all
due & thankfull acknowledgement be remembered & recorded of us
ourselves & enjoy y^e sweete fruits of so great Benefits & sweet
unheard Libertie amongst us.

Again, a word in generall as to this fland of Quininnagut, y^e truth is
at my earnest motion, y^e great Sachim (aforesaid) gave us leave
to cut y^e grass of Quininnagut & of other flands (some six
Copied in w^{ch} w^{ch} I write of my selfe had interest). And it is also
true, y^e these two present dissenting Sachims (with whom John
Easton joyns) & their Father decreed have long & most barbarously
abused y^e inhabitants of Rhode Island, about y^e cutting of grass on
Quininnagut, driving them (for their prayer sake) to here & pay for
the same, their own selves, w^{ch} y^e for me. As at Sachim

An Answer to a scandalous papr w^{ch} came to my hand from y^e Massachusets clamouring agst y^e purchase & slandering y^e purchasers of Qunnunagut Iland, & subscribed by John Easton.

The good Providence of y^e God of Truth seemes to call me to discover the Truth of proceedings touching this Iland: partly as jt hath pleased his Mercy to use me as an Instrum^t, betweene y^e English of Rode Iland & y^e Natjues about Rode Iland, Qunnunagut &c from y^e beginning partly, as I haue bene calld out by Letters from y^e Massachuset & from Rode Iland, as allso by Importunitjes from y^e Natjues to travell in thjs busines: partly, as jt concernes me (in many respects) some thing more then every one, to endeavour y^e peace & Libertie of the Colony within jt selfe, & betweene thjs Colony & other Colonies & y^e Barbarjans round about vs. And lastly, this Firebrand having bene sent about y^e Countrey, & even to y^e Gov^{rs} hand of the Massachuset, & from hjs to mine, I judge jt my dutie not to be vnwilling to put to thjs seasonable hand to quench jt.

I shall first premise a word to y^e purchase of Rode Iland with ye Grasse of Qunnunagut &c with w^{ch} thjs papr begins.

I haue acknowledged (& haue & shall Endeavor to maintajne) y^e Rights & proprietjes of every Inhabitant of Rode Iland in peace. Yet since there js so much sound & noyes of Purchase & purchasers; I judge jt not vnseasonable to declare y^e Rise & bottome of the planting of Rode Iland in y^e fountaine of jt. It was not price nor Money y^t could haue purchased Rode Iland. Rode Iland was obtained by Loue: by y^t Loue & Favour w^{ch} that hon^{ble} Gentleman Sr Hen: Vane and myselfe had with y^t great Sachim Mian-

tunnomu about y^t Leauge, w^{ch} I procurd betweene y^e Massachuset English &c & y^e Narrigansets in the Pequt War.

It js true, I advised a Gratujtie to be presented to y^e Sachim & y^e Natiues And because Mr. Coddington, & y^e rest of my Lo: Countrimen were to inhabite y^e place, & to be at y^e charge of y^e Gratuitie I drew vp a wrjting in Mr Coddingtons name, & y^e names of such of my Lo: Countrjmen as came up with him, & put it into as sure a Forme as I could at y^t time (amongst y^e Indjans) for y^e Benefite & Assurance of y^e present & future Inhabitants of y^e Iland.

Thjs I mentjon y^t as y^t truly noble Sr Hen. Vane hath bene so great an Instrum^t in y^e hand of God for y^e procuring of thjs Iland from y^e Barbarians as allso for y^e procuring & confirming of y^e charter So jt may by all due & thanckfull acknowledgm^t be remembred & recorded to us & ors, w^{ch} reape & enjoy y^e Sweete fruits of so great Benefites & such unheard of Liberties amongst vs.

Againe, a word (in generall) as to thjs Iland of Qunnunnagut, y^e truth js, y^t at my Earnest motjon, y^t great Sachim (aforesaid) gave vs leave to cut y^e grasse of Qunnunnagut, & of other Ilands (some excepted in w^{ch} Mr Wintrop & my selfe had interest). And jt js allso true, y^t these two present dissenting Sachims (with whom John Easton joynes) & thejr Father deceased, haue long & most barbarously abused y^e Inhabiants of Rode Iland, about y^e cutting of Grasse on Qunnunnagut, driving them (for thejr peace sake) to hire & pay for at extreame rates, thejr owne Grasse, w^{ch} y^e former Great Sachim most freely granted to vs. In w^{ch} respect (to end the barbarous Controuersie & wrong:) as allso to further & advance y^t great End of planting & subduing thjs barbarous Countrey to English Industrie & Civilitje: I haue longed for & rejoyce in y^e purchase of thjs Iland: and y^e rather because, as

jt lyeth in y^e bozome of y^e Colony & so convenient for Rode Iland: So jt pleased y^e right hon^{ble} y^e Councell of State, by Authoritie of Parliam^t, to nominate thjs Iland in one of thejr particular expresses relating to vs. Now as to y^e charges in this false paper agst y^e Purchasers (who are the greatest part of all y^e chiefe Inhabitants of Rode Iland both Magistrates & others) thjs fowle mouth clamor^s, y^t they are false & prfidious, & (in effect) cheato^{rs}, Drunckards, Murtherers &c.

First, false & prfidious, because being appointed by y^e Towne of Newport to Purchase jt for y^e Towne, they Purchased jt for themselues.

I answer: questionly if thjs had bene y^e case, jt had bene a prfidious Act: but this js not y^e case, jt js either ignorantly or enviously mistaken, & so represented ugly: I haue observed & examined thjs busines to y^e bottome, & I find not, but y^t as to (y^e substance of) y^e proceedings of y^e purchasers, they haue not only bene just & righteous, but allso deliberate & prudent, & (in a manner) unavojdable & necessary.

For the truth js, this busines of Qunnannagut was intangled & clogd with many thornie Controuersies & extreame difficulties. The English at Newport haue bene at Long & Constant Contentjon with these 2 Young Sachims & thejr Father, about y^e cutting y^e Grasse on Qunnunnagut. And jt js y^e wonderfull mercy of God y^t y^e English & Pagan bloud hath not bene yearely mixt together about this matter: In So much y^t Such of y^e Inhabitants as had Interest in these Medowes were forced to petition y^e Towne, of Newport, in thejr Towne meeting; either to stand by them (y^t is by force of Armes) in y^e cutting of thejr Medowes, or else to giue them leaue to make a New Purchase themselues.

The Towne of Newport wrote to me about this matter & allso chose out a Committee of Six men to Endeavor a New Purchase.

Now also, y^e English were at Controuersie amongst themselves about a New Purchase: Newport and Portsmouth could not agree about it. Nor y^e Towne of Newport within jt selfe: And those very Comm^{rs} appointed to make the Purchase could not agree in whose name y^e Purchase should be made, whether in y^e Towne of Newports name, or in y^e name of all y^e Inhabitants of Rode Iland, & there fore were glad to pitch upon a thjrd tearme Viz: y^t they would Purchase jt [for Common good.]

Lastly y^e very Acts & Orders of y^e Towne of Newport were at Controuersie & devided one agst another about thjs matter. By one Act six men were chosen to make a purchase: Endeavo^{rs} were used, & moneys lajd out. But within a few months a crosse Act was procur'd by some Viz: y^t they should stand to thej^r former purchase, & not proceede in any further purchase: By w^{ch} Act y^e former Comm^{rs} were deserted & befoold & their monies & charges Lajd out neuer accounted. The dore was still left open to Contjnuall Contention & hazard of Bloudshed (about y^e Medowes) betweene y^e English & y^e Barbarians And a New dore of Temptacion opened for any other (English or foraigners) to make a purchase (of w^{ch} very thing there was not a vajne report then abroad extant.) Now let all impartiall & sober minded judge, what obligation Lay upon y^e 6 men appointed (as y^e paper Simply Speaks) to make y^e purchase? what prfidiousnes appears in any of them, if after thej^r being shamefully turned out of thej^r Trust & Appointm^t w^{ch} they had sollemnly with subscription undertaken & (thej^r time & charges neuer accounted for to them) faythfully discharged: And after y^e Townes declaration y^t they would make no purchase: And y^e Iland was in hazard & like to be bought by others: I say what prfidiousnes appears in any of them, if (about 2 years after all y^e former Agitatjons) a Select & resolved Company of Volun-

tiers out of all y^e Iland, Portsmouth & Newport, breake through all Difficulties & resolute (for thejr own & y^e publike good, both of Iland & Colony) to goe thorough with y^e Worck ? Yea I querie whether if these purchasers (so fowlely represented by y^e slanderour as prfidious fellowes &c) had not stept forth with so timely a Resolution & vigour for thejr owne & y^e publike good: whether they could haue wiped out y^e Blot & Imputatjon of being false & perfidious to themselves & y^e whole Iland ?

But alas, how easie & common jt js for arrant whores to cry whore first? For, (if this be John Eastons pen or subscribing) how js jt y^t in y^e beginning of this papr he playes y^e Atturney for y^e right of all y^e Inhabitants of Rode Iland, & yet in his second thoughts & Ljnes of y^e same papr he once & againe blotteth out all Portsmouth & snatcheth all to his owne Towne of Newport, for w^{ch} prfidious dealing (from his owne pen apparent) I presume y^t no honest man of Newport will giue him thancks:

Again this prfidious paper acknowledgeth y^t we liue by Lawes, & Saith (w^{ch} js a mistake) y^t y^e Narrigansets haue bound themselves to ou^r Lawes, in Controuersies between vs & them: And, though he knowes y^t y^e other Colonies, destroy our Liberties & teare up ou^r very Foundacion & Constjtutjon: And though he knowes y^t his Highnes y^e Lo: Protecto^r his Courts are open amongst vs, & y^t neither himselfe nor any y^t I know of hath made complaint, or commenced any sujt agst any of y^e purchasers: yet hath he most prfidiously joyned with these bruitish pagans (who haue dealt so long so basely with Rode Iland about thejr Medowes) to hinder y^e bringing of this Iland from paganisme to Civilitie; yea & allso to bring in all y^e other Colonies (& especially y^e Massachusetts on vs, from whence so many are expressly or (in effect) expelld & banished. He knowes what numbers in

every Towne of y^e Colony are obnoxious & liable to y^e prisons & whips & Halters of y^e Massachusets (for thejr Religion sake) euen hjs owne Father as much as any: what gracious Spjrit then (either of Anger, Envy or Reuenge) js thjs child of, who can subscribe & joyne with y^e very Pagans to bring in an Invndation of Calamitie vpon vs, yea & to hazard y^e very hanging of his owne Father?

Another charge js y^t they made this purchase of Druncken Sachims, y^t they sold them Liquors w^{ch} made them drunck &c.

I answer: First hjs distinctjon of Druncken & Sober honest Sachims, js both Lamentable & ridiculous: Lamentable y^t all y^e Pagans are So giuen to Drunckennes. It js ridiculous allso y^t these two dissenting Sachjms should be esteemd such sober honest men. When (beside y^e Long experience of thejr owne & thejr Fathers honestie about y^e Meadowes) jt js notoriously knowe what conscience all Pagans make of Lying, Stealing, Whoring, Murthering &c. And as for Drunckennes allso, they will not say themselves (especially y^e youngest of the two) but y^t jt js thejr frequent & delightfull practice.

But as to y^t imputation of making them drunck (I suppose he hath some other meaning then y^t childish Fancie y^t the Liquors made y^e Indians drunck) I ans: I have examined these particulars following & I find vpon unquestionable Testjmonie y^t the Sachims when they went to y^e Iland to treat were sober: that when they treated they were sober (& all meanes of their Distemp purposely kept from them) When they contracted & concluded they were Sober: When they receaved paym^{ts} they were Sober: they haue bene allso sober when in thejr most publike Sollemne meetings they haue sollemly declared to all Natjves thejr Sale of y^e Iland & their Resolution to majntajne thejr Act. And if the Natjues had Liquor^s & were distempered before

or after, what is y^t to y^e invalidating or aspersing of a Busines? If so, what contracts, what purchases among Merchants or others in thjs Countrey, or any Countrey shall stand & be effectuell?

Lastly y^e purchasers are Said to countenance y^e druncken Sachims to cheating y^e honest Sachims & y^e Inhabitants & to kill them &c.

I answer as there haue bene many of these Indjan princes & their Lords bene satisfied (besides those two first Sachims who sold & had unquestionable Right to Sell:) So haue there bene many large proffers tendred to these two young dissenting Sachjms from first to last. But as they inherite thejr Fathers Basenes about y^e Meadowes, So doe they inherite his Barbarous Spjrit, as to Bargaines with y^e English. He (& y^e elder of these) being rich in peag haue made demaunds like themselves. He for some other Lands, & these for thjs Iland, Viz: That we should furnish them with poyson to dispatch Onkas: that we should Constantly send y^e English Souldjers with thejrs agst Onkas; that we should Constantly send up contribution to their Niccommoes or Devilish Feasts: On these & other such abominable Tearmes they haue offred to consent & y^t without any other paym^t:

Lastly jt js well knowne y^t these two Young Sachims would not stirr (for the other Sachims majntajne their Sale, by their owne Constant practice & Customes) did not y^e Subscriber or some other mould or sharpen them to a mischiefe.

But y^e true God js a Righteous Judge & his Justice shines in two or three particulars about this Iland. First y^e obstructo^{rs} of y^e former & Later purchasing of this Iland are like to haue litle share in it.

2ndly Such as haue peaceably & patiently long borne y^e baseness of these two Sachjms & thejr Father about thejr Meadowes are now like to be well supplied.

3rdly these honest & Sober Sachjms who haue thus propa-

gated thejr Fathers wickednes toward the English are like to be cut short of thejr Fajr proffers w^{ch} hjetherto thejr Prjde & Folly haue refused.

By this time, I hope I haue (in some measure) stopt y^e mouth & shew'd the weakenes & wickednes of these Outragious clamors: But (as before) I add, Since y^e Subscriber mencions his Highnes y^e Lo: Prot: y^t if any Law be broke, or wrong done, no man amongst vs, but in his Highnes Courts of Iustice in y^e Colony js responsable & liable to an Equall Triall. But if the Subscriber had in truth owned his Highnes Authoritie ouer vs, or had respected y^e Colonies peace & Liberties: this naked Indjan Bastard had neuer thus bene sent to bawle ouer y^e Countrey (to y^e shame of jts barbarous Nakednes) Nor had bene thus whipt & sent home to jts owne Father by

A cordjal frjend to thjs Colony & all y^e English
Colonies R. W.

Providence 25.6.

1658 (so calld)

they treated they were sober (of all manner of their wine. Now only
kept from them) When they contracted & concluded they were sober
When they received paym^t they were sober. They have since
sober when in their most publick solemn meetings they have solemnly
by declared to all Nations their Sale of y^e Land & their Resolu-
cion to maintaine their Act.

And if the Nations had signed & were distressed before or after,
what it y^t to y^e invalidating or aspersing of a Business? So
what Contracts, what purchases among Merchants or others
in this Country, or any Country shall stand & be effectually?

Lastly y^e Purchasers are said to maintainance y^e drunken Sachims to
be their friends & to be their friends & to be their friends

For we are satisfied, since these two first Sachims who
sold the land unquestionably right to sell. So have there
many large offers tendered to these two young
young Sachims for a first & last. But as they inherit their
fathers passions about y^e Tobacco, so do they inherit his
barbarous spirit as to our games with y^e English. He had
been of this kind rich in money had made dominion like
himself. He for some other land. This for this land
that we should furnish them with tobacco to match Onkai
we should constant send y^e English Settlers with large
Ink. That we should send y^e English Settlers with large
Ink. That we should send y^e English Settlers with large

For we are satisfied, since these two first Sachims who
sold the land unquestionably right to sell. So have there
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we should constant send y^e English Settlers with large
Ink. That we should send y^e English Settlers with large

But y^e true God is a Righteous Judge & his Justice shines in
or these particulars about this Land. First y^e Obstruction of
y^e former & later purchasing of this Land, are like to have both share in it
Such as their long term y^e business of these two Sachims & their
fathers a boy & their Trade are like to be well supplied.

3^o y^e three kind of sober Sachims who have thus propagated their fathers
wickedness toward the English are like to be cut short of their fair
offer as well as their fair offer as well as their fair offer

By this time, I hope y^e names of some merchants, singt y^e mouth, & shewd the
wickedness & wickedness of their wickedness. But (as before) said, since
y^e Subscribers mentioned his highness y^e Lord. y^e if any can or order or wrong
tion, no man amongst us, but in the high courts of justice in y^e Colonies
such a liability to an equal claim. But if the Subscriber had in truth owned
his highness's authority over us, or had respected y^e Colonies peace & liberties,
this naked Indian Bastard had never thus been sent to our y^e Country
(to y^e shame of its barbarous Nations), Nor had been thus whipt & sent home
to y^e own Father

Providence 25. 6. 1658 (30 Cells) R. W.

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